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ELI WHITNEY BLAKE

1836—1895.

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In Memoriam.

Eli Whitney Blake, LL. D.

Born April 20, 1836,

Died October 1, 1895.

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In the following pages will be found a brief account of the life and character of Eli Whitney Blake, LL. D., who was for twenty-five years Hazard Professor of Physics at Brown University.

It has been thought proper that some permanent record should be made of a noble and influential life, so modestly lived that its course was seldom marked by the conspicuous events which usually help to preserve the memory of an active career.

During his lifetime Professor Blake made many friends, but his devotion to his work often prevented the close and frequent association which both he and they desired. Such friends will be glad to preserve in this slight memorial sketch, a record of his work and some suggestion of his personality.

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Eli W. Blakely

ELI WHITNEY BLAKE, LL.D.

Eli Whitney Blake was born in New Haven, Connecticut, April twentieth, 1836. He was the son of Eli Whitney Blake and Eliza Maria O'Brien, his wife; the one a nephew of Eli Whitney, the inventor, the other a great-grand-daughter of Rev. James Pierpont, the principal founder of Yale College.

He graduated from Yale in the class of 1857, holding membership in the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity, the Skull and Bones, and other societies.

After graduation he spent a year in teaching at a private school in Unionville, Connecticut, and subsequently studied for another year in the Sheffield Scientific School.

Later he studied for three and a half years in Germany; at Heidelberg under Kirchhoff and Bunsen, at Marburg under Kolbe, at Berlin under Dove and Magnus. He devoted his attention to both chemistry

and physics, for although he became ultimately a physicist, it was his original intention to be a chemist.

Returning to America, he became Professor *pro tempore* of Chemistry and Physics in the University of Vermont, holding this chair during the college year 1866-7.

In 1868-9 he was Acting Professor of Physics in Columbia College, and was then appointed Professor of Physics and the Mechanical Arts at the newly-opened Cornell University.

From 1870 to 1895 he was Hazard Professor of Physics in Brown University.

Professor Blake received the degree of A. M. from the University of Vermont, and that of LL.D. from Brown University.

Owing to ill-health in his family, he resigned his chair in the spring of 1895. His own fatal illness, however, began even before this time, his constitution having been overtaxed by the continuous and confining duties of his profession. His death occurred at Hampton, Connecticut, October first, 1895.

Professor Blake was twice married, and his second wife, Elizabeth Ellery Vernon, survives him. By his first wife, Helen M. Rood, who died in 1869, he leaves a daughter, Alida Gouverneur, married in 1881 to Barclay Hazard of Santa Barbara, California, and a son, Eli Whitney Blake, now of Syracuse, N. Y.

Professor Blake inherited exceedingly strong mechanical and scientific tendencies, and was an indefatigable worker in the laboratory. His experiments extended into all departments of physics, and were generally made with apparatus designed and constructed by himself. It has been deeply and widely regretted that the excessive routine duties of his position prevented his following the marked bent of his genius toward scientific investigation and invention. The little that he had leisure to do in this direction was of such quality as to make his name known and esteemed in the scientific world, both in this country and abroad. His beautiful device for photographing

the motion of metallic plates vibrating under human speech, merits special mention even in this rapid sketch.

One of Professor Blake's most characteristic traits was the enthusiastic welcome, and wherever possible, the disinterested aid, which he gave to every dawning invention or discovery in which he could discern the promise of genuine service to science or mankind. From this double point of view, it was his great pleasure, during the winter of 1876-7, in connection with his intimate friend, Prof. John Pierce, to assist Mr. Alexander Graham Bell in experiments with the telephone—then in the very early stages of its development.

Among Professor Blake's published papers may be mentioned the following:

1. Stereoscopic Advertisements:

Am. Jour. of Science and Arts, 2d Series, v. 30, p. 304.

2. On a method of producing, by the electric spark, figures similar to those of Lichtenberg:

Ib. v. 49, p. 289.

3. On the presence of rubidium and caesium in triphyline:

Ib. v. 33, p. 274.

4. A method of recording articulate vibrations by means of photography:

Ib. 3d Series, v. 16, p. 54.

5. The human ear-drum:

Journal of Otology, Boston.

Wilson Hall, the superb physical laboratory of Brown University, stands as a monument not only to the generosity of the late George F. Wilson, through whose bequest it was erected, but also to the unwearied and conscientious labors of Professor Blake, who personally designed, to the smallest details, the admirable arrangements of the building.

Modest and unassuming as was his nature, Professor Blake was always ready to perform, for the good of the community in which he lived, any service which he deemed appropriate to his position. His varied interests may be inferred from the fact that at various times during his residence in Providence

he served as President of the Free Kindergarten Association; as Vestryman of St. John's Church; as Trustee of the Rhode Island Hospital; as a Director of the Providence Athenæum; as member of the Library Committee of Brown University; and as member of the School Committee of the City of Providence. He was also a member of the Berzelius Club; the Churchmen's Club; the Friday Evening Club, and Doctors' Club, of Providence; and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Professor Blake possessed mental powers of a high order, combining a singularly keen insight with great breadth of view. His colleagues at Brown University recognized this in his clear, philosophical treatment of those complex ethical, intellectual and practical questions which continually confront a college faculty.

He was a man of pure and noble character. His sensitive reverence for truth led to extreme conscientiousness, a delicate sense of honor, and firm moral

courage; qualities which were a part of himself, and in no sense worn as garments to be put on and off. His interest in his students and his affection for them were genuine and enduring. One of the most unselfish of men, he was also one of the most loving and most beloved of friends.

Although he allowed himself very little social enjoyment, he was a highly valued member of several informal societies, where he was warmly welcomed as a man brilliant in literature and conversation; as an affectionate and delightful companion.

To quote the words of an old friend, "Pure in heart, knightly in conduct, he was thoroughly a Christian gentleman."

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF
BROWN UNIVERSITY, JUNE, 1895.

Much to the pain of his colleagues, Professor Eli W. Blake has felt obliged, owing to Mrs. Blake's ill health, to resign the Hazard Professorship of Physics, which he has held with such credit to himself and to the University since 1870. It is no disparagement to the exertions of President Wayland, Dr. Caswell and Professor Greene, to name Professor Blake as in effect the creator of the department of physics as it exists in Brown University to-day. He devised and launched the general courses in physics now taught; he devised and for years personally conducted the special courses for laboratory students—work never done here until his time; he selected nearly all our valuable physical apparatus, much of this being of his own invention and constructed by his own hands; and he has repaired and rendered of service many of the then useless instruments which were in the University's possession when he came. His labors and his judgment, as a member of the building committee, in

arranging and constructing Wilson Hall, were conspicuous and invaluable.

Professor Blake has distinguished himself not only in the class room and in the laboratory but also as a faculty adviser and as a promoter, in every way, of the welfare of the University. Though not a graduate here, he has entered heartily into all schemes for enlarging the University's resources and usefulness. His pecuniary gifts to these ends amount to a large sum. His wide mental sympathies, making him, while a physicist, much besides, his serious though benevolent character, his public spirit, placing him among the noted and most useful citizens of Providence, his unvarying gentlemanliness, and his generosity to students and others when in need, wonderfully endear Professor Blake to his colleagues and pupils as well as to all others who have the good fortune to know him.

At its regular meeting on May 30, 1895, the faculty of the University adopted the following minute for its records and for transmission to Professor Blake.

“The faculty, being informed that Professor Eli Whitney Blake, for twenty-five years professor of physics in the University, has resigned his chair, sends to him its greetings, and expresses to him from each and every member of the board the best wishes for his health and happiness, and at the same time the most sincere regret that he has decided to withdraw from the University.

“Professor Blake’s services to Brown University have been such that no one who knows him can have failed to recognize his devotion to his chosen branch of science, most constant industry in that laboratory which is a memorial of his thought and skill as well as a monument to its generous donor, his deep interest in the welfare of his pupils, and the conscientiousness with which he applied himself to every task to which his duty called him. While his high attainments as a scholar and a man of science have secured for him the respect alike of his colleagues and his pupils, his genuineness of nature, his high sense of honor and duty and truth, his sweetness of temper and his purity of soul have added to respect an enduring and sincere affection.”

MINUTE OF THE DOCTOR'S CLUB OF PROVIDENCE.

In Memoriam.

ELI WHITNEY BLAKE.

Through the death of Professor Eli Whitney Blake the Doctor's Club of Providence, for the first time in its history of over twenty years, has been called to mourn for the decease of a brother member. The members of the club assembled in regular meeting to-day desire hereby to express their love for their departed brother, and their deep sense of loss and bereavement.

He was a man illumined and guided by a gracious spirit from his birth. His inborn and inherited gifts were quickened and enlarged by generous culture. He was a master in his chosen field of science, and in other fields his attainments were large. His great learning he used without stint for the good of others,

both through unwearied devotion to those whom he formally instructed, and through the many offices and relations by which he served and edified the bodies with which he was officially connected, the community in which he lived, and the friends whom he loved. Through a gentleness that was strong, through a patience that was courageous, through the great sympathies of a heart in which abounded the most cheerful mirth and the tenderest compassion, he made life sweeter and better for those with whom his life was spent. Scrupulous in all his conduct, unwearying in fidelity, stainless in honour, loving his fellow man, he also loved his God and believed in Him, with the firm, but simple and child-like faith of a Christian. To those who remain his death seems untimely, for the world had need of him, but after his faithful toil which has consumed him, he rests in his God who in His infinite wisdom and love has called him to Himself.

His brothers of the Doctor's Club, remembering him with great love, recalling fondly all their affec-

tionate converse with him in the past, acknowledging gratefully all the comfort, help and inspiration to better thinking and living, that they have derived from him, and uttering their regret at his death, desire at the same time to convey their hearthfelt sympathy to those of his own household, family and kindred who have been blessed by his most intimate companionship and tenderest love, and who are now called to mourn for him most deeply.

BY THE DOCTOR'S CLUB,
WILLIAM CAREY POLAND,
Committee.

PROVIDENCE, Twenty-sixth October, 1895.

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Author

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